

THE MORMON ALLIANCE

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May 20, 1993

**President Ezra Taft Benson
President Gordon B. Hinckley
President Thomas S. Monson
President Howard W. Hunter
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
47 East South Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84150**

Dear Brothers:

We write as trustees of the Mormon Alliance--a group of concerned members and friends of the Church--organized in 1992. Our purposes are to counter defamation of the Church by outsiders (as we did in issuing a press statement opposing *Godmakers II*) and to identify and resist cases of spiritual abuse in which religious authority is used, not to nurture and bless, but to dominate, marginalize, control, and even punish church members.

We wish to meet with you at your earliest convenience to share our concern about recent events that have hurt and even alienated members of the Church and that have, in the process, damaged the Church's reputation. We believe that the Church and its members are being injured by the following practices:

1. Using or threatening to use disciplinary action against church members for public or private discussion of religious and/or church-related topics.
2. Using the temple recommend and, in the case of BYU students, the ecclesiastical endorsement procedures, as instruments of arbitrary control.
3. Perpetuating disciplinary procedures that are inconsistent with the Doctrine and Covenants and with fundamental principles of fairness and due process.
4. Maintaining secret files on and conducting surveillance of nonviolent church members.
5. Instructing local leaders to tell members that an inquiry into the member's church standing originated at the local level when, in fact, it did not.

6. Withholding from members information on such issues as church finances, history, and decision making.
7. Fostering the concept that power or influence may be maintained by priesthood authority alone, without persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, and pure knowledge.
8. Treating differences of opinion between a leader and a member as disobedience or lack of faith on the member's part and attempting to resolve differences, not on the merits of the respective positions, but by making the issue a test of the member's loyalty.
9. Characterizing members who have concerns about church governance or doctrine as members in need of counsel or discipline.
10. Allowing ecclesiastical leaders to interfere with academic freedom, scholarly activity, and professional pursuits.
11. Creating a class-system of spiritual inequality based on church position.
12. Creating a class-system of spiritual inequality based on gender by subordinating women in church governance, policy formation, and decision making; by discounting their contributions; and by devaluing their personal worth.

These practices are examples of unrighteous dominion. They involve the arbitrary and coercive use of ecclesiastical power to serve perceived institutional interests at the expense of powerless members. We believe the underlying cause of this unrighteous dominion is the increasing tendency of some church leaders to reinterpret and expound the gospel of Jesus Christ in legalistic and judgmental terms, thereby eroding the Saints' faith in Christ's unconditional love and power to save.

The victims of these abuses are rarely enemies of the Church. Rather, many are diligent and stalwart members who have devoted years of their lives to the Church, who serve willingly, who send their children on missions, who pay tithes and offerings, and who help make church programs possible. We are concerned that these members' freedom to think, speak, write, assemble, and choose is increasingly being curtailed by fear of disciplinary action; by labels of "apostasy," "unrighteousness" and "disobedience"; by confiscation of temple recommends; and by threats of excommunication. Here are some examples:

- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich of New Hampshire was denied clearance to speak at the 1993 BYU Women's Conference by the Board of Trustees despite a lifetime of devoted Church service, a temple marriage, the careful mothering of five children, and

distinguished professional achievements recently recognized by the Kelly, Dunning, Bancroft, and Pulitzer Prizes and the MacArthur Fellowship. She is the first Latter-day Saint to achieve such professional and popular recognition. In national press coverage, she has willingly and positively talked about her Mormon heritage and beliefs and how they have shaped her professional values. In spite of this, no reason has been given for her exclusion from participation at the BYU Women's Conference. Those who know her are mystified at what could be "unacceptable" about her. This instance demonstrates how decisions made arbitrarily and without explanation or accountability can damage faithful members of the Church.

- Eugene Kovalenko was excommunicated in California for "apostasy" in 1992 by a disciplinary council that failed to comply with the procedural safeguards for due process and fairness specified in the scriptures and in the Church's *General Handbook of Instructions*. Eugene received insufficient notice of the disciplinary proceedings against him. The notice did not specify (i) the names of his accusers, (ii) the charges against him, or (iii) the writings and statements which were alleged to contain evidence of apostasy. Eugene made several specific requests for this information, all of which were ignored, making it impossible for him to provide information necessary to present his case in a true light. Eugene's stake president simultaneously acted in the conflicting roles of complaining witness, investigator, prosecutor and judge thereby compromising his impartiality. The stake president did not step aside to allow an impartial party to preside, nor did he inform Eugene of the right of an accused member to request this procedure. The disciplinary council was conducted like a police interrogation. Eugene was repeatedly interrupted. After six hours of questioning, Eugene was allowed to present only 6 of his 15 character witnesses, who were instructed to speak for only 5 minutes each. Contrary to D&C Section 102, the high council did not act independently; no high councilor made an opening statement or presented a case; and he did not have the benefit of one-half of the council. As provided by D&C Section 107, Eugene filed an appeal with the First Presidency, but his appeal memorandum, submitted on his behalf and at his request, was rejected. The First Presidency refused any direct contact with Eugene. They would not respond directly to Eugene's repeated, specific, written requests for information about his appeal. They communicated only with Eugene's stake president, even though his decision was the subject of the appeal. Eugene requested but was denied a copy of the First Presidency's letter affirming his excommunication and any opportunity even to see that letter. To this day, Eugene has no idea why his excommunication was affirmed in the face of so many procedural violations; nor does he understand why his actions were adjudged apostate.
- Amy (pseudonym) was raped by an acquaintance while working in Alaska for the summer. The rape infected her with Herpes III, an incurable condition which will require caesarian-section delivery of any future children, who even so will bear a 40-60 percent risk of infection. Emotionally devastated, Amy returned to her parents' home in Provo and went to see her former (campus) bishop. She had not been active

in the Church for much of the previous year. After listening to her story, her bishop merely responded: "Can't you see a connection between your inactivity and what happened to you?" Amy confided in her friend Brenda (pseudonym), who was shocked at the bishop's coldness. Brenda then sought guidance from her stake president. She specifically wanted to know if the counsel of Amy's bishop was appropriate and if there were someone else Amy could talk to. Though Brenda stressed to the stake president Amy's need for comfort and emotional support, she was also asking for reassurance herself. The stake president did not answer Brenda's questions. Instead, he remarked that he was not in charge of Amy's spiritual guidance and that Amy's bishop "knew what he was doing." The stake president then proceeded to chastise Brenda for doubting the bishop's judgment, calling her own worthiness into question. These reactions are more than insensitivity. The implication that Amy somehow "deserved" to be raped because she had been inactive constitutes an ecclesiastical abuse: blaming the victim for having been victimized. Brenda was also victimized in the same way: because she raised a problem, she became the problem.

- On the day award-winning Mormon historian Michael Quinn first met his current stake president in Salt Lake City, the president handed him a letter stating that Michael was under investigation for apostasy. The president cited as the reason for this investigation Michael's historical research and writings and his statements to the press on historical and other topics. The stake president did not question the factual accuracy of Michael's work. Michael continues to bear testimony of the basic tenets of Mormonism. Nevertheless, the stake president apparently assumes that divergent opinions or interpretations on church history or doctrine are grounds for discipline, that scholarly writing—even if painstakingly supported—is evidence of apostasy, and that an attack on the messenger will somehow invalidate the message.
- Devery Anderson and his wife, both of Washington State, are converts and parents of two young children. Devoted to family history and temple work, Devery serves in his elders' quorum presidency and also chairs a quarterly study group that discusses Mormon history, literature, and sociology, and that sometimes hosts guest speakers. When his stake president ordered him to disband this group, he refused. The stake president was unable to show that it injured any attenders, violated any churchwide policy, promulgated false doctrine, or caused Devery to neglect his family or church duties. What Devery thought would be a discussion of the comparative worth or danger of the study group quickly degenerated into a demand that Devery obey his stake president's order regardless of its content. In July of 1992, the stake president confiscated Devery's temple recommend. The situation remains unresolved. This instance illustrates how the arbitrary confiscation of a temple recommend may be used to punish a faithful member for non-compliance with a church leader's personal views.

Perhaps some abuses are due to conflicts of personality or overzealousness. However, we believe that the real problem is more fundamental. The disturbing pattern emerging from these and other cases evidences an authoritarian system without checks and balances. Leaders mistrust members, quickly resort to force, assume a morally superior position, and see themselves as obligated to control members. This attitude makes any visit with an ecclesiastical leader potentially damaging to spiritual sensitivities and faith. Genuine spiritual concerns may go unaddressed if every issue is reduced to loyalty or obedience.

This trend towards institutional oppression is a sad and counterproductive aberration in the Church. We lament this record. In our view, the corrective is the gospel of Jesus Christ, lived with mutual good will, trust, respect, accountability, and forgiveness.

We share the belief that we rejected Satan's plan to obtain obedience through compulsion and instead elected Jesus' plan of free choice and of learning through our mistakes. We believe that Joseph Smith's philosophy is worthy of a mature and free people: *"I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves."*

We believe the following "correct principles" are set forth in scripture and are binding on the Church--leaders and members alike:

1. **Love.** Love should be the guiding principle in all church governance. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). "Let all things be done with charity" (I Cor. 16:14).

2. **Truth.** All church leaders and members should "speak the truth in soberness" (D&C 18:21) as they understand it. "I know that the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken" (2 Ne. 9:40).

3. **Equality.** Every member is entitled to equal respect, dignity, and credibility, regardless of church calling. "Let every man esteem his brother as himself" (D&C 38:24, 35). "He denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Ne. 26:33).

4. **Common Consent.** Common consent is a vote, not a loyalty test. Church leaders "are dependent upon the voice of the people for the continuance of the authority, the rights and privileges they exercise" (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 158). "For all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith" (D&C 28:13). "We desire that the brethren and sisters will all feel the responsibility of expressing their feelings in relation to the propositions that may be put before you. We do not want any man or woman who is a member of the church to

violate their conscience. . . . We would like all to vote as they feel, whether for or against" (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 157).

5. Scriptural governance. Church governance should comport with scriptural canon. "Thou shalt take the things which thou hast received, which have been given unto thee in my scriptures for a law, to be my law to govern my church" (D&C 45:59).

6. Openness. Members should have access to all non-privileged information in the custody of the Church. Those acting or speaking on behalf of the Church should do so openly, not in secret, subject, however, to the priest-penitent privilege. "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19; see also Brigham Young, October Conf. 1855, *Journal of Discourses* 3:45).

7. Revelatory accountability. Because a prophet does not always speak as a prophet, leaders should disclose what they believe to be the source of their directives, interpretations, and instructions. Correspondingly, members have a right and a responsibility to obtain confirmatory revelation. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28; see also Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 6:100).

8. Tolerance. Criticism and loyal dissent should not be trammelled. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). Church members should be allowed wide latitude for spiritual growth, and leaders should not use their authority to compel conformity. Joseph Smith's words, uttered in defense of Pelatiah Brown, should be a guiding principle:

I never thought it was right to call up a man and try him because he erred in doctrine, it looks too much like Methodism and not like Latter day Saintism. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church. I want the liberty of believing as I please, it feels so good not to be trammelled. It [doesn't] prove that a man is not a good man, because he errs in doctrine (*The Words of Joseph Smith*, 183-184).

9. Righteous leadership. No priesthood leader should use the priesthood to cover sins, gratify pride or ambition, or exercise control over

members in any degree of unrighteousness (D&C 121:37). Nor should any leader attempt to maintain any power or influence by virtue of the priesthood, except by persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, and pure knowledge, without hypocrisy or guile. Leaders should reprove only when moved upon by the Holy Ghost, and then show forth afterwards an increase of love (D&C 121:41-44). Any act undertaken by a priesthood holder in violation of these principles is void and the leader's priesthood is forfeit (D&C 121:37).

10. Due process. Whenever church disciplinary action is necessary, there should be a consistent and even-handed application of principles of due process and fairness, such as adequate notice, impartial hearing, presumption of innocence, trial by witnesses and evidence examined in their true light, opportunity for defense, and appellate review—all "in equity and justice" as required by the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 42:80-83; 102:12-27; 121:34-44; 107:32, 78-84; and 134:4, 10-22: *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 114).

11. Responsibility. Church leaders are responsible for their own actions and not those of other members. Church members are responsible for their own actions and cannot escape that responsibility by following church leaders. "I am responsible for the doctrine I teach; but I am not responsible for the obedience of the people to that doctrine" (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 13:1). Brigham Young also affirmed the principle of responsibility in these words:

I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 9:150).

12. Christlike qualities. Church leaders and members alike should serve in their callings and exercise their spiritual gifts with meekness and humility, ready to forgive and be forgiven of sin. "The decisions of these quorums . . . are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge,

temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity" (D&C 107:30). "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matt. 6:12).

In closing, we affirm to you our love for the Church and our commitment to its empowering promises and its opportunities for soul-stretching service. Like you, we desire to strengthen, not weaken, the Church. We have no ecclesiastical authority to correct the problems we have described. Only you and your brethren have that. For this reason, we would welcome the opportunity to sit down together with you in a spirit of love and mutual trust to address these important matters. We believe that God's power will attend us if we meet in his name in sincerity of heart.

Very truly yours,
The Trustees of the Mormon Alliance:
